

THE
SOLEMN LEAGUE

AND

COVENANT:

A LECTURE

BY

Rev. J. R. LAWSON,

BARNESVILLE,

PUBLISHED BY THE RENWICK ASSOCIATION,

IN CONNECTION WITH THE

REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, SAINT JOHN, N. B.

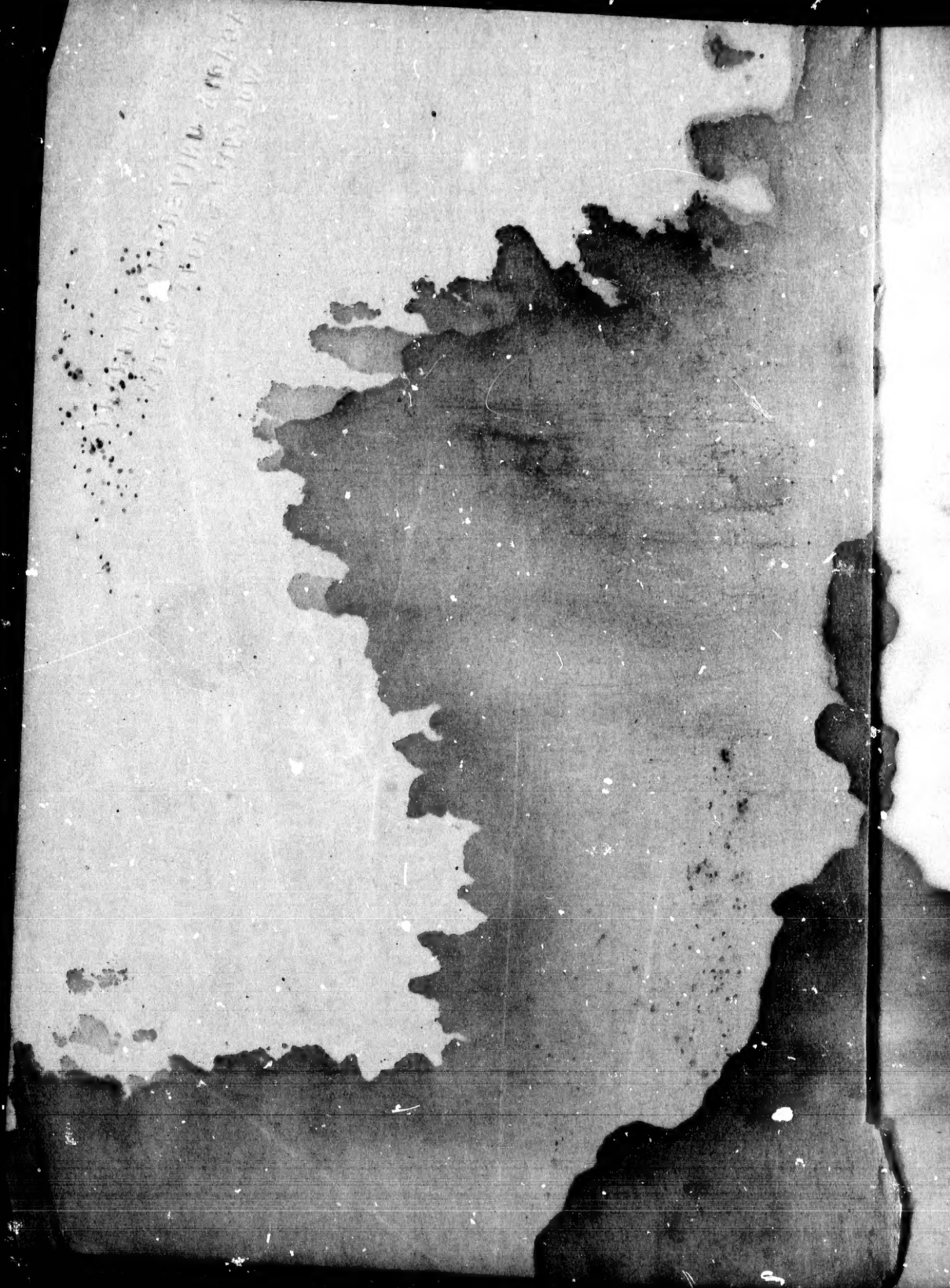
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SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT :

A LECTURE.

THAT public social covenanting is a moral duty, to which churches and nations are called, in certain circumstances, is a doctrine which none will dispute, who are familiar with the lively oracles of God. The duty has been exemplified in all periods of the church's history, with evident tokens of the divine approval and with the happiest results. During all the different stages of the old Testament dispensation this important duty was engaged in by the Church and Commonwealth of Israel. "Ye stand this day," said Moses to the children of Israel, in the land of Moab, "all of you before the Lord your God. * * * * * That thou shouldst enter into the Covenant with the Lord your God." (Deut. xxix. 10, 11). A few years afterwards the thousands of Israel renewed that covenant, when they unitedly said, "The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice will we obey." So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and ordinance in Shechem." (Joshua xxxiv. 24, 25.) In the days of good King Josiah, this covenant was renewed by "all the men of Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests and the prophets, and all the people both small and great. And the King stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all their heart and with all their soul, to perform all the words

of this covenant that were written in this book, and all the people stood to the covenant." (2 Kings xxiii. 2, 3.)

That this social religious covenanting was to be continued in new testament times, is evident from the *morality* of the thing, founded as it is on the *moral relations* which God and man sustain to each other: it is evident also from certain old testament intimations that the duty would be exemplified in the Gospel day. "In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of Hosts." (Is. xix. 18.) It is evident also from the circumstance, that the ordinance has never been formally abrogated, which would have been the case, if not intended to be continued under the Gospel. Moreover, the primitive christians were wont to give themselves to God in solemn covenant. The Apostle, in writing to the Corinthians, commends the Macedonian Churches for engaging in this exercise. "And this they did, not as we hoped (or contrary to our expectation); but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us, by the will of God." (2 Cor. viii. 5.) The giving themselves to the Lord, here referred to, could not be that personal dedication which every christian makes of himself to God on the day of conversion; for that would not have been contrary to the Apostle's expectation. Neither could it be their making a profession of religion, and entering the fellowship of the Church; for that would not have been contrary to the Apostle's expectation either. It must have been some extraordinary dedication of themselves to God in solemn covenant—some formal act of social covenanting, such as the Apostle had not expected from persons so recently converted, but which it gladdened his heart to hear of, and which was well pleasing in the sight of God. Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, regarding the christians

in Proconsular Asia, says, that they were accustomed to bind themselves by an oath to God, not to commit wickedness. The Waldenses, centuries ago, knew what it was to covenant with God and each other. The Protestants in Germany, in Luther's time, once and again, engaged in the same duty. And the Pilgrim Fathers, before they left the little vessel that had borne them across the ocean, to the shores of New England, entered into a solemn covenant with God and each other, and frequently renewed it. So that the practice of social religious covenanting is not a sectarian affair, peculiar to any one denomination. It has been exemplified by all denominations of christians. It is plainly warranted by the word of God, by the examples of the best Reformed Churches, and by the tokens of the divine approval that have invariably accompanied it when engaged in aright. The purest and best times of the Church have been covenanting times; and the purest and best days that the Church will ever see in her militant state, will be those to which the prophet Jeremiah alludes, when "the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping, they shall go and seek the Lord their God; they shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, saying, come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." (Jer. l. 4, 5.)

I propose, on the present occasion, to present before you one of the most remarkable covenants ever entered into by any church or nation, viz., that which is commonly designated "The Solemn League and Covenant of the three kingdoms of England, Ireland, and Scotland." It is the testimony of one of the most impartial historians of modern times—the Free Church historian, Hetherington—that "it was the wisest, the sublimest, and the most sacred

document ever framed by uninspired men." The same historian asserts that it was "the noblest in its essential nature and principles, of all that are recorded among the international transactions of the world."

It was a very dark time in England, the few years that preceded 1643. It was a time of civil strife and religious dissension. King Charles I., in the true spirit of his father, and of all his successors of the Stuart dynasty, was aiming to be an irresponsible sovereign. In all his movements, he was aiming at a two-fold objective point. One was to secure the possession of arbitrary power in his own person; the other was to subject the Churches of Great Britain and Ireland to the Episcopal form of Church government. The carrying out of these plans and purposes, was mainly entrusted to William Laud, then Bishop of London, afterwards, Archbishop of Canterbury. The lawless and violent manner in which this minion of a despotic power prosecuted his work—his attempts to introduce false doctrines and Romish ceremonies into the English Church—the violent persecution he carried on against the Puritans, and his taking some direct steps towards a union with the Church of Rome, aroused the indignation of vast multitudes of the people, not only against himself, but also against the King and the whole order of bishops. The subject of Church government began to be very seriously agitated. It became the all-engrossing topic of the times; and, it is said, that in the course of twenty years, no fewer than thirty thousand pamphlets were issued on the subject.

It was at this posture of affairs, that England turned her eyes to Scotland. That nation had just emerged from a fierce struggle with arbitrary power. She had just secured for herself a free Parliament to settle the

affairs of the State; and a free General Assembly, to settle the affairs of the Church. By a series of very decisive measures, she had purged out many abominations that had crept in during years of misrule, to mar the beauty and impair the efficiency of her ecclesiastical and civil institutions. Scotland's Church had put on her beautiful garments, and was singing rapturously the song of Zion in other days—"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream; then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."

It was to Scotland, in these bright days of her history, that the eyes of Englishmen were turned, in the critical circumstances in which their church and nation were placed. Commissioners from both houses of Parliament, and also from the venerable Assembly that was then sitting at Westminster, were sent to the Scottish General Assembly, in August 1643. It was at that meeting of the Assembly, at which these English Commissioners were present, that the proposal was first made, that the two kingdoms of England and Scotland should enter into a solemn bond for mutual assistance in all things pertaining to the right government of the Church, and also of the State. The Covenant was drawn up by Alexander Henderson, the Moderator, and was agreed to by all the members, and by the English Commissioners, with the deepest emotion. Having passed the General Assembly, it was conveyed to the Scottish Parliament that was then in session, and was sanctioned and ratified unanimously. Thence it was carried to England, where it was approved by the venerable assembly of Divines, ratified by the Parliament, and solemnly subscribed by the members of the House of Commons, and by the members of the House of Lords,

and by all ranks and conditions of men, from the highest to the lowest. It was subsequently arranged that this covenant should also in its provisions embrace Ireland; and accordingly in the following year, it was carried to that country, and very generally administered throughout the north, and taken and subscribed with evident tokens of much heartiness by all ranks.

Here then we have a great *national* deed—a deed as truly national as any that ever occupied a place on the statute book of Britain—a deed solemnly sworn to by the church and convention of estates in Scotland, by both Houses of Parliament in England, and by vast multitudes in Ireland—a deed that was to constitute the compact between the king and people, that was to be solemnly sworn by the king at his coronation, and by every member of parliament, and which was actually sworn to by Charles II. on his ascending the throne—a deed which was to regulate all civil and ecclesiastical affairs throughout all time. Here we have a great national deed before us; and now the question comes up, *what has the Britain of the present day to do with it?* Two hundred and twenty-five years have passed away since that national Covenant was placed upon the statute book of the realm. Alexander Henderson who framed it, all the members of parliament who ratified it, the thousands and tens of thousands who swore to it, and subscribed it, have passed away. Perhaps the very parchment on which it was originally written has perished under the influence of the corroding tooth of time. Two hundred and eight years have passed away since that transaction had any legal authority in any part of the wide domain of Britain. Seventeen years after it became law, it was obliterated from the statute book and burned by the hands of the common hangman, systems

were set up and established that had been solemnly adjured, and the constitution in church and state returned to its former condition. I have no doubt, that many who live under the British sceptre have never heard of this national transaction. Of those who have heard of it, there are many who consider it to have been a vile puritanical measure, that ought never to have been on the statute book, that never had any moral obligation, and that has none now. There is another class who look upon it as something very necessary and useful *in its day*, but which has served its purpose and is not needed *now*. There is still another class who have the conviction, that the "Solemn League and Covenant" was not only necessary when it was first framed, but equally necessary *now*, not only binding when it was first entered into, but binding *now*, and that it will be binding so long as the British nation lasts, or until the objects contemplated in it shall be accomplished. Which of these classes has the truth on its side? My object in the sequel shall be to show that the latter is the view that is most consonant with reason, scripture, and God's past dealings with churches and nations.

Before entering upon the direct examination of this question, there are two or three preliminary points which it may be desirable to clear up. *The first question* that comes up is, *can a people in any circumstances bind their posterity?* I think there are very few who will deny that they *can*—certainly there are none who can deny it on rational or scripture grounds. Cannot a parent bind his child to God in the ordinance of Baptism? Cannot a man in certain circumstances, bind his heirs and assigns to pay his debts? Cannot a nation's rulers bind their successors? Treaties with other nations, entered into hundreds of years are binding on Britain still. The na-

tional debt is still obligatory, although those who contracted a large portion of it have passed away. In the Covenant which ancient Israel entered into at Horeb, posterity was included, and it was binding upon them hundreds of years afterwards. Even in Jeremiah's time, posterity was charged with the sin of violating that Covenant. "The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my Covenant which I made with their fathers." (Jer. xi. 10.) The Covenant which Joshua and the elders of Israel made with the Gibeonites, on their entrance into the promised land, was binding on posterity hundreds of years afterwards, and they were punished for violating their fathers' engagement. That a people may be bound by the transactions of their forefathers is a principle, reasonable, scriptural, and illustrated in all God's dealings with the children of men in all ages. Suppose the principle abolished, and the very foundations of civil society would be destroyed. Suppose that when men die all their engagements were to die with them, there would be an end to all faith in bonds, and treaties, and deeds, and the social fabric would fall to pieces. On that principle *we* might repudiate the national debt, for *we* did not contract it—on that principle the children of Israel in Hosea's time, talked nonsense when they talked of God, finding their progenitor Jacob at Bethel, and there speaking to *them*. (Hosea xii. 4.) On that principle, it would have been unjust in God to punish the Israelites in David's time, for violating a contract which had been entered into nearly four hundred years before they were born. (2 Sam. xxi. 1.)

But then, there is another question. Did the original framers of the Solemn League and Covenant, contemplate *posterity* in that transaction? That they *did* so, is evident from the *preamble* to the document,

which sets forth that one object of it was "the honor and happiness of the King's Majesty and his *posterity*." And then in the body of the Covenant, they assign as another object, "that we *and our posterity after us*, may as brethren live in faith and love." Again they pledge themselves to endeavour, "that the three Kingdoms may remain conjoined in a firm peace and union *to all posterity*." And in the act of the General Assembly approving of the deed, they characterize it as "the most powerful means by the blessing of God, for settling and preserving the true Protestant religion with perfect peace in his Majesty's dominions, and propagating the same to other nations, and for establishing his Majesty's throne *to all ages and generations*." So that we have evidence sufficient to justify us in asserting, that in this bond the original contractors meant not only to include *themselves* but *their posterity*, to the remotest generation. Had they a right to do so? In the judgment of the Holy one of Israel *could* they bind their posterity? In the estimate of High Heaven, is that Solemn League binding upon Britain *now*, and will it be binding in *coming ages*? This is the question at issue—it is the question which I propose to endeavour to answer.

In the first place, *the subject matter of the Covenant was moral and scriptural*. Of course, if it can be shown that there is anything in it that is contrary to the moral law, or the great principles of the Gospel, then so far as it is so, it never had any moral obligation, and never *can*, for no engagement can ever make that binding which is morally wrong. But if it can be demonstrated, that the *subject matter* of the Covenant is moral and scriptural—that its great principles are the principles of the Bible itself, then it follows that it cannot be otherwise than of *perpetual* obligation. Let us look at some of the leading fea-

tures of this remarkable bond. The first article is the following: "We shall sincerely, really, and constantly, through the grace of God, endeavour in our several places and callings, the preservation of the reformed religion in the Church of Scotland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, against our common enemies; the reformation of religion in the Kingdoms of England and Ireland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, according to the word of God, and the example of the best reformed churches; and shall endeavour to bring the churches of God in the three Kingdoms, to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church government, directory for worship and catechising; that we and our posterity after us, may as brethren live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us." There is only one part of this pledge that any one can possibly object to, viz.: the pledge to *preserve the reformed religion in Scotland*. That it is the duty of every Christian, to seek the reformation of religion in England and Ireland, and every where else, according to the word of God, no one can deny. That it is the duty of every Christian to seek the union of the church of God on a scriptural basis, no one will deny either; but that our forefathers should pledge themselves and their posterity to endeavour to preserve inviolate the reformed religion, as then attained to in Scotland, is what some persons may object to. But what was there in that reformation that any one can *scripturally* object to. Were not the great principles of it, the principles of the Bible itself? Was not the Lord Jesus Christ recognized as the sole Head of the Church and supreme Head of the State? Was not the Law of Christ recognized as supreme in all causes civil and ecclesiastical? Were not the same in the

state as well as rulers in the church, required to be "men of truth, fearing God and hating covetousness?" Did not God in a very signal manner manifest his gracious presence in the ordinances of his house, and so own the work of his servants as his work? What was there in the Reformation as then attained to in those bright days of Scottish history, that was not worthy of being preserved, of being contended for, and of being handed down as a precious legacy to future generations? And what was there in the pledge of our forefathers to preserve that Reformation, that was not in full harmony with the spirit and letter of the apostolic admonition, "Whereunto ye have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things." (Philippians iii. 16.)

The second article of the Covenant is as follows: "We shall in like manner, without respect of persons, endeavour the extirpation of Popery, prelacy (that is, church government by archbishops, bishops, their chancellors, and commissaries, deans, deans and chapters, archdeacons, and all other ecclesiastical officers depending on the hierarchy), superstition, heresy, schism, profaneness, and whatsoever shall be found to be contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness, lest we partake in other men's sins, and thereby be in danger to receive of their plagues, and that the Lord may be one and his name one in the three Kingdoms." Now I presume that the only part of that pledge to which any person can possibly take exception, is that clause in which the Reformers bind themselves to *extirpate Popery and Prelacy*. On this clause some have grounded the charge that the Solemn League and Covenant embodies *persecuting principles*. A more unfounded charge was never preferred against any public document. In order to see this, it is only necessary to consider that in the

clause alluded to, there is no reference whatever to *persons*. The allusion is exclusively to *systems*. Hence, immediately after the word *Prelacy*, they, in a parenthesis, define what is meant by that, viz., "the government of the church by archbishops, &c." That the charge of persecution is wholly unfounded is also evident from the known principles of all the Reformers. They abhorred the doctrine and practice of having recourse to carnal weapons for the suppression of error, so long as it did not interfere with the peace and well-being of civil society. They abhorred the Mahommedan doctrine of propagating a religious system by fire and sword. Even in the case of the bitterest enemies of the Reformation, the very worst intolerance that was ever shown to them, was their exclusion from a seat in Parliament. And I affirm, that it is unworthy—it is disingenuous—it is unmanly, in any persons to attempt to fasten upon the Covenanters the charge of *persecution*—a charge, that is not only contradicted by the very language of the bond itself, but also by all the well-known principles and practice of all the Reformers.

It is true, the word "extirpate" is an ill-looking word. To some it suggests the idea of the rack, the thumbscrew, the dungeon, and the scaffold. Well, whatever be its meaning in the vocabulary of the Church of Rome—whatever be its meaning in the vocabulary of the House of Stuart—in its derivation and literal meaning, it suggests no such frightful images—it literally signifies *to root out*. And is there no way of rooting out a system, but by fining, imprisoning, torturing, and burning those who embrace it? Is not the true idea of rooting out a system the removal of all support from it, just as a tree is rooted out by the removal of the soil from it, and so leaving it to fall. And that was all that the Reformers meant

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by the *extirpation* of the Popish and Prelatic systems. What they meant was, that all support should be withdrawn from these systems; all individual and national support. Was that persecution? And why should they not bind themselves to endeavour to suppress these systems? If they believed that Popery was wrong, why should they not endeavour to root it out as a plant that our heavenly father hath not planted. If they believed that Prelacy was wrong, why should they not endeavour to have it banished from the land? Did not common honesty make the demand upon them, that they should set their faces against every system that they believed to be wrong, and seek to have it removed? That is the very thing that all denominations are aiming at. The Prelatist believes that Presbyterianism is wrong, and he seeks to have it rooted out. The Independent believes that both Prelacy and Presbyterianism are wrong, and he seeks to have them rooted out. The Baptist believes that infant sprinkling is wrong, and he seeks to have that system abolished. The aim of all denominations is to root out the systems to which they are opposed, and to establish what they believe to be truth, in their room. And who that has any common sense blames them for it? Does not common honesty demand it. And for a person to call himself a Protestant, and yet to disavow any desire or intention to interfere with Popery—for any one to call himself a Presbyterian, and yet to disavow any desire to interfere with Prelacy—for any one to call himself a Baptist, and yet to disavow any opposition to the system of infant sprinkling, is dishonest in the extreme. It is treason against one's own avowed convictions. Why then should our forefathers be blamed for pledging themselves to do what all denominations aim at, though in some instances they have not the

manliness to avow it, viz. : to endeavour to root out all systems opposed in their judgment, to the word of God, and injurious to men.

The third article of the Covenant is as follows : " We shall with the same sincerity, reality, and constancy, in our several vocations, endeavour with our estates and lives, mutually to preserve the rights and privileges of the Parliaments, and the liberties of the Kingdoms ; and to preserve and defend the King's Majesty's, person, and authority, in the preservation and defence of the true religion and liberties of the Kingdoms ; that the world may bear witness with our consciences of our loyalty ; and that we have no thoughts or intentions to diminish his Majesty's just power and greatness." Now let me ask, is there any thing unscriptural in any part of that pledge ? Loyalty, founded on scriptural principles, is what every Christian ought to cultivate and exemplify. Such loyalty the New Testament everywhere inculcates. " Let every soul be subject to the higher powers, for there is no power but of God, the powers that be are ordained of God." " Wherefore ye must needs be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." (Romans viii. 1, 5.) " Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates." (Titus iii. 1.) These are solemn New Testament admonitions, enforced by the most weighty sanctions. For any one, therefore, on pretence of Christian liberty, to refuse conscientious allegiance and submission to scripturally constituted civil authority, is to resist the ordinance of God ; and they that resist, the Apostle declares, shall receive to themselves damnation. This was one of the great principles of our re-forming forefathers, as embodied in their confessions, testimonies, and Covenants. They believed of civil government as an ordinance of God—they believed

in a monarchy too, as the best form of civil government, and they wished that form perpetuated in the state till the end of time.

But there was one thing, they did not believe, viz. : that any civil power that happens to exist in the providence of God, has a right to be regarded as his moral ordinance. They did not understand the New Testament as teaching any such a doctrine as that. When Paul in his epistle to the Romans, speaks of the "higher powers," to which we are to be subject "not only for wrath but also for conscience sake," he immediately proceeds to specify the character of those to whom such a conscientious allegiance is due. "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil." "For he is the minister of God to thee for good, but if thou do that which is evil be afraid, for he beareth not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." (Rom. xiii. 3, 4.) Now let it be borne in mind that this is assigned as the *reason* of conscientious allegiance. When this picture is realised in any existing civil government, conscientious allegiance is due to it as the *moral ordinance* of God ; but when the very reverse is the case, and when civil government is established on principles unscriptural, and men are elevated to office who are strangers to scripture qualifications, it is subversive of every Bible principle, to assert that *conscientious* allegiance is due to that government as God's moral ordinance. In such a case, submission "*for wrath's sake*" may be expedient and dutiful, but "*for conscience sake*," it would be wholly unscriptural. We will suppose, that by the "*higher powers*," the apostle meant *every* existing government that is established in the providence of God, then, of course, he very specially meant Nero, the Roman Emperor, at the time when

the epistle was written. According to this view, we are to contemplate the apostle, by the direction of the Spirit, admonishing the Christians at Rome to bear conscientious allegiance to Nero, because he was "the minister of God for good" to his people—to Nero, because he was "a revenger to execute wrath upon those who did evil"—to Nero, because he was "God's minister attending upon this very thing." But who was this Nero?—the most cruel monster that ever sat on the throne of the Cæsars—the man who feasted on human tortures—the man who had such an abhorrence of the christians, that he actually set the city of Rome on fire, so that it might be blamed on the christians, and that he might have some excuse for feasting his eyes on their burnings. Common sense will say that the apostle did not mean Nero. He did not mean every one who is raised to office in the providence of God, irrespective of his moral character. He meant those *exclusively* who are set up by the authority of God, who acknowledge the supremacy of God, and who rule for God. These are the "higher powers" to whom christians are to be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. This our reforming forefathers knew, and hence they would not promise allegiance to *every* existing government. They looked for moral qualifications in their rulers. They required that they should rule in the fear of God, and for the cause and glory of God. Hence their pledge was to "preserve and defend the King's Majesty's person and authority, in the preservation and defence of the true religion and liberties of the Kingdoms." This was the loyalty of the Reformers in those days. It was the loyalty of the stricter Covenanters in the days of the persecution. Cameron, Cargill, Renwick, and their followers, have been sometimes branded as "anti-government men."

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Never was there a greater calumny. They believed in civil government, and honoured it as an ordinance of God. They preferred monarchy to any other form of government. They never relished the protectorate of Cromwell; and they rejoiced with unfeigned joy when that protectorate was abolished and monarchy restored to them, in the person of their constitutional and loved king; and it was not until after years of misrule and tyranny, during which he had trampled on his own solemn engagements, and on the dearest rights and liberties of his subjects—it was not until all petitions and remonstrances had proved ineffectual, that they withdrew their allegiance from him as a tyrant and a traitor; and never was there a people who would more heartily have joined in the national cry, “God save the King,” had they not had the conviction on their minds, that it would have involved them in the guilt of acknowledging, as the ordinance of God, a government founded on the subversion of solemn national engagements, and trampling on the rights and liberties and consciences of the people. And this is the only theory of allegiance that is either rational or scriptural. The doctrine that one is bound to bear true allegiance to *any* government that happens to be set up, is wholly inconsistent with reason, and the great principles of the Bible. That every one is by *birth*, a subject of the national society, and so bound to the constitution and laws of the country where he was born, is a justly exploded theory. A very short time ago, Lord Stanley, one of the chief secretaries of state, stated in his place in Parliament, that “the dogma of natural allegiance is now obsolete.” Allegiance is a *voluntary* thing; it is not a question to be determined by the geography, but by reason, conscience, and the law of God. One is as much under an obligation to look into the constitution

of the *national* society—to examine its provisions, and compare them with the great principles of the Bible, before he identifies himself with it, as he is to look into the constitution and rules of any *ecclesiastical* society before he becomes a member of it. To become a member of a national society that is founded on wrong principles, is just as great a sin as it is to join a church that is corrupt in doctrine, worship, discipline, or government. To stand aloof from an immorally constituted state is as great a duty as to decline connexion with a corrupt church. This great principle was well understood and fully recognised, by our reforming ancestors, and hence they only pledged themselves to “preserve the King’s authority in the preservation and maintenance of the true religion and liberties of the Kingdoms.”

As the remaining articles of the Covenant are just so many corollaries from the great principles embodied in those which have thus been reviewed, they need not be dwelt upon in this hasty sketch. Let it be observed, in general, that if the subject matter of the bond be scriptural—if its principles are the principles of the Bible itself—if the ends contemplated in it are not local and temporary, but universal and perpetual—then it follows, that whether the Covenant as a Covenant should perish or not, the obligations involved in it could never perish, but are as binding now, as they were in any past period, and will be binding to the remotest posterity.

Secondly, the Covenant is still binding, because *the great contracting parties still exist.*

A Covenant involves the idea of *two* parties : one promising, the other engaging. In the Covenant of which we speak, there were two parties, God on the one side, the British nation on the other. There was God, the Governor amongst the nations, speaking in His

blessed word, promising certain precious blessings on the one side, and there was the British nation, on the faith of these promises, pledging itself to God, on the other side. I say, the British *nation*; and this is a point that is specially to be considered. It was not a *party* in the nation, but it was the *nation* itself, in its national capacity, that was the contracting party on the human side. For any one to assert that it was the deed of a *party* in the nation, and not a *national* deed, is to betray the utmost ignorance either of the facts of the case, or of what it is that constitutes any deed *national*. We are not to infer that a deed is not of that character, because there are persons opposed to it. On that principle, there would not be a single enactment on the statute book of Britain that would have a right to be called *national*. On that principle, the recent deed of Confederation would not be national or provincial, because many persons were and are opposed to it. What renders any transaction national, is the voice of the *majority* speaking through their representatives. Now, if the majority can make any deed national, the Solemn League and Covenant was so. In Scotland "the takers of it are said to have been seven to one of the opposers." In their speech to the Council of the City of London, after their return, the English Commissioners affirmed that they believed "the Solemn League had been universally taken by the whole Scottish nation." In England, it was sworn to by both Houses of Parliament—by the Westminster Assembly—by the Council of the City of London, and by all ranks and conditions of men. The history of the times affirms that it was taken by the Lords and Commons legally assembled in Parliament, then by the generality of the people of England, and that the Parliament ordered it to be hung up before them to be a constant monitor to them. His

Majesty Charles the Second, on his accession to the throne, swore the Covenant for himself and his successors. So that if any thing could make a deed *national*, the transaction of which we speak was pre-eminently so. If the circumstances mentioned in the preface to the Covenant, namely, that it was "agreed upon by Commissioners from the Parliament and Assembly of Divines in England, with Commissioners of the Convention of Estates, and General Assembly, in Scotland; approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and by both Houses of Parliament and Assembly of Divines in England, and taken and subscribed by them, Anno 1643; and thereafter, by the said authority, taken and subscribed by all ranks, in Scotland and England the same year; and ratified by Act of the Parliament of Scotland, Anno 1644; and again renewed in Scotland, with an acknowledgment of sins and engagement to duties, by all ranks, Anno 1648, and by Parliament, 1640, and taken and subscribed by King Charles at Spey, June 23rd, 1650, and at Scoon, January 1st, 1651." If these circumstances did not invest the Solemn League and Covenant with a truly *national* character, I would freely challenge any person to show that there is a single deed in the statute book of Britain that has any right to be regarded as a *national deed*.

Here, then, we have the two parties in this federal transaction—God on the one side, and the British nation on the other. And now the question comes up, has any one of these parties ceased to exist? Has the British *nation* ceased to exist? No. Different successive generations have passed away, but the *nation as such*, has maintained its identity. A man does not become a different person by the changes that are continually occurring in the particles of his

body; he maintains his identity amid all these changes; and in old age, he is answerable for the transactions of his youth, although not one particle then remains of what in youth constituted his physical system. In like manner, a nation maintains its identity amid all the changes that take place in its membership. It is on this principle of the continued identity of the national society throughout successive generations, that deeds enacted a thousand years ago are binding still. It is on this principle that the national debt, though contracted many years ago, is obligatory still, and will be obligatory until the last farthing is paid. The doctrine we advocate, is not that an engagement entered into by one nation is binding upon another nation; but that an engagement entered into by a nation, is binding upon that *same nation* in different successive periods of its history. The doctrine is, that God views posterity as having as really contracted in their fathers, as if they had contracted in their own persons, as Levi paid tithes in his progenitor Abraham, although he did not live till hundreds of years after Abraham's time. So that the question is not exactly, will posterity be answerable for their *father's deeds*? but will posterity be answerable *for their own* deeds, entered into through their fathers. Britain was not one nation in the days of the Stuarts, and another nation now: she is the same nation now, that she was then; and is therefore at this day as firmly bound by the lawful unfulfilled engagements of that period, as a man is now bound by the lawful unfulfilled contracts of his earlier years.

Thirdly, the Covenant is still binding, because *the objects contemplated in it have not been accomplished.*

It is a favourite argument with some who oppose the doctrine of the descending obligation of the British

Covenants—that they are not needed *now*—that they were very necessary and served a good purpose two hundred years ago, but the condition of things in church and state is now very different from what it was *then*, and there is no need for any Covenants of the sort. Is it really so, that the ends contemplated in the Solemn League have been accomplished? Will any one assume the responsibility of saying, that the great objects which the people of England and Scotland and Ireland sought, and for the promotion of which they entered into these Covenants, have been fulfilled? Is Popery down in Britain? The question needs no answer. The truth is, Popery is more rampant in Britain *now* than in the darkest days of the Stuarts—Popery is advancing in Britain with giant strides. Every session of Parliament is signalized by some fresh concession to it. The Romish party holds the balance of power in the Imperial Parliament. Grants out of the national revenue, to further the interests of the Papacy, are annually becoming larger and larger, and many right hearted men are trembling for the Protestantism of the country, and its constitutional liberties. Surely if there was need of this Covenant of our fathers to check the progress of Rome in their day, there is equal need of it in ours, when Romanism in Britain is stronger than it was then, and more audacious in its attempts to bring the whole country under its dominion. And, then, what about Prelacy? Is it anything more scriptural in its essential features than it was then? Is it less prevalent? Is it not the religion of the Crown, of the Parliament to a large extent, and of the highest classes of society throughout the land? Is it not the *established* religion? So that if it was unscriptural *then*, it is equally unscriptural *now*—if it was prevalent then, it is equally prevalent now, and if it was right to endeavour its removal

alien, who can consistently say that it is not right now? And what about the unity of the churches in Britain? Are they yet one in doctrine, worship, discipline and government? This was another object that the Reformers had in view. Has it been accomplished? No one will say that it has. *Should* this object be accomplished? Every christian will say that it *should*—that the whole universal church of Christ in all lands should be one. This would be the fulfilment of the Redeemer's prayer, "That they all may be one." And this will be the case in the good time coming, when "the Lord shall be one, and his name one, throughout all the earth." This glorious condition of things is still future. The church of the Redeemer is still split up into many sections. So that if a Covenant to promote union and uniformity was needed two hundred years ago, with what truth can it be affirmed that it is not equally needful *now*? For any person to assert that the Solemn League was needed when it was first framed, but not necessary now, is just to say that it was needed to oppose Popery then, but not needed now, though Romanism is more rampant in Britain now than it was then—that it was required to oppose Prelacy then, but not required now, though Prelacy is the same system that it was then, and equally prevalent—that it was a desirable and necessary means of uniting the Churches then, but not desirable or necessary now, although the divisions and subdivisions into which the visible Church is now split up are more numerous than they were then; and although it is of greater importance that the people of God should be united now, because they are engaged in a greater work, viz., the work of conveying God's salvation to all lands. So that of all the absurd positions that any one could take in opposition to the doctrine of the present obli-

gation of the Solemn League, the most absurd is that of those who affirm that it was necessary *once*, but not so *now*. The truth is, there is not one of the great and glorious objects contemplated in that national transaction that has yet been accomplished; and therefore a Covenant solemnly and nationally entered into for the promotion of these objects, remains in full force to this day, and will so remain until that glorious time shall come when great voices in heaven shall be heard proclaiming, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ."

OBJECTIONS.

First. *If the subject matter of the Covenant was of a moral nature, there was no need to enter into it; for what is moral and scriptural is binding, without a formal engagement.*

Such an objection would apply with equal force to almost any one of the great Covenant transactions recorded in the Old Testament. The children of Israel were always under an obligation to serve the Lord; and yet they frequently engaged themselves in Solemn Covenant to do so, and with many tokens of the Divine approval. A man is always under an obligation to speak the truth, and yet it is sometimes requisite that he should be put upon his oath, not to lay him under an obligation to speak the truth, but to *strengthen* that obligation. The idea of a Covenant engagement to perform some moral duty, is not to bring persons under an obligation to perform it, but to strengthen that obligation. Anterior to the Covenant transaction, they were bound to that duty by the law of God, but now they are bound to it by a superadded obligation, their *own voluntary engagement*. A man is morally bound to speak the truth whether he swears

to it or not, but after he has taken a solemn oath there is a superadded obligation resting on him ; and if he fails to declare the truth, there is not simply the guilt of *lying*, but also the guilt of *perjury* resting upon him. Now, the people of Britain were always under an obligation to perform the duties, and prosecute the ends contemplated in the Covenant, but when they voluntarily entered into a solemn engagement, and renewed that engagement, again and again, they brought themselves under an additional obligation. The great design of the transaction, was not to bring themselves under an obligation to perform a *new* duty, it was to deepen in their minds a sense of their obligation to perform an *old* duty—to bind themselves more closely to that to which they were *always* bound by the eternal immutable principles of truth and righteousness.

Second. *Is it not unreasonable that our ancestors' transactions should be binding upon us?*

Well, carry out the principle, that posterity cannot be reasonably bound by the deeds of their ancestors, in any circumstance, and see what it will lead to. Then one must deny that he is in any sense bound by his parent's covenant at his baptism—he must deny that the national debt is now binding on Great Britain, for they have all passed away who contracted a large portion of it—he must deny that he is under any obligation to pay the debts of his ancestors under any circumstances, for he did not personally contract them—he must deny that Joshua's Covenant with the Gibeonites was binding upon posterity, and he must allege that it was unjust in God to punish them for the violation of an engagement, entered into hundreds of years before they were born—he must deny

that the Covenant which the people of Israel made at Horeb was binding upon future generations, and he must brand it as unreasonable and unjust, that hundreds of years afterwards, even in Jeremiah's time, the God of Israel should call them to an account for breaking their fathers covenant. Let any one adopt the principle that posterity cannot be reasonably bound by their ancestors' deeds, and he is fairly committed to all this cluster of denials—indeed, he is fairly committed to a denial of the whole Bible; for from the first to the last it reveals a system of representation, or Covenant privilege and obligation, entailed upon children and children's children. And herein lies one of the woeful consequences of the rejection of a Bible principle; it lays one under the necessity of denying many other facts and principles to which it has an affinity. Errors go in clusters, and when a person adopts one error, he is obliged for consistency's sake to take the whole under his protection. So that when a person denies the descending obligation of the British Covenants upon posterity, he becomes fairly pledged to take under his patronage the whole brood of errors regarding covenant obligation, civil and religious.

Third. *Was not that Solemn League and Covenant repealed long ago, repealed by the same national authority by which it was ratified, and how then can it be binding after it has been nationally set aside.*

That the British nation has repealed the act so far as the law of the land is concerned is a melancholy fact which no one can deny. Seventeen years after it became law it was formally abrogated. An "Act Recissory" was passed immediately after the restoration of Charles II., by which it was declared null and

void. The utmost national contempt was cast upon it. It was ordered to be burned by the hands of the common hangman in some of the principal towns of the kingdom. Systems solemnly abjured in it were set up and established. That "Act Recissory" is still on the statute book, and is British law to this day. That the Covenant has been *formally* repealed by the act of the Legislature, cannot be denied. But then the question comes up—could it be really repealed? Could Britain so repeal it as to free herself from its obligation? In order to get at the truth on this point, let us suppose a case. Suppose that a bill should be introduced into the House of Commons to repudiate the national debt—that it should pass that House, and then be carried to the House of Lords—that it should unanimously pass that department of the Legislature, and then receive Her Majesty's consent in council—and that then proclamation should be made, that the national debt is no longer binding—that no more interest will be paid to the creditors, and that no effort will be made to refund the principal. What would be thought of such an act as that? Would not every sense of rectitude and honor abhor it as a violation of all faith and a trampling under foot of all honesty. It would never reconcile one to it to be told that it was carried through Parliament by an unanimous vote; no one could believe that any legislation could ever free the nation from the obligation to pay its lawful debts. And suppose that years after such an act should have passed the Legislature—sweeping away by one stroke of dishonest policy the millions of the national debt, and beggaring the thousands and tens of thousands of creditors—some persons should come forward and advocate the claims of these impoverished creditors, and insist that the nation should fulfil its engage-

ment to them. What would be thought of the person who should meet their remonstrances with such language as this—"Oh that account was settled long ago—Parliament long ago cancelled that debt." What would be thought of such a law, and what would be thought of the morality of the person who would quote it as a sufficient reason for withholding from honest creditors, their lawful and chartered rights? But is a debt to *man* of more importance than a debt to God? Is a *pecuniary* contract with man more solemn and binding than a *religious* contract with God?—and if Britain could never free herself from her lawful engagements to man, how is it possible that she could ever free herself from her moral and scriptural engagements to her God? No. Nations may repeal the laws of a former age, provided these laws involve no principle of moral obligation; but a law once on the statute book of the realm, that is based on the eternal immutable principles of truth and righteousness—a law that is intended to secure the inalienable rights of men, or the higher rights of God: in a word, a law that binds to what is morally right, can never be repealed. *Man* cannot repeal it—no body of men can repeal it. So that Britain might pass an "Act Recissory," and might issue a proclamation declaring the Covenant to be null and void, but she never can shake off the obligation of a deed *scriptural* and *national*; but it remains in all its force to this day, and will so remain so long as the nation lasts, or until the objects contemplated in it shall be accomplished.

Now if these things be so, we see 1st. What is the great national sin of Britain, viz., the sin of *national perjury*. The Solemn League and Covenant was not like an ordinary act of parliament—it was not something that passed the Legislature by mere votes. It

was something that was also *sworn to* with uplifted hands to God. The members of the House of Commons not only *voted* for it, but also *swore* to it. So did the members of the House of Lords ; and not only did Charles II. give his assent to it as to an ordinary act of Parliament, but he also swore to it as the representative of all his successors. To violate such an enactment as that, as Britain has done—to declare it by act of Parliament null and void—to set up systems solemnly abjured in it—to carry on the administration in Church and State in plain and palpable antagonism to its principles and its pledges, as Britain has done, is to be involved in the guilt of national perjury ; and never will the British nation enjoy the full favour of a Covenant keeping God, until she nationally repents of that sin, renews her Covenant with her God, and brings her whole administration into conformity to it. 2nd. We see how impossible it is for one who holds the doctrine of the present obligation of the national vows, to consistently swear the common oaths of fealty to the national society.

In regard to allegiance to a national society, there are several mistakes into which persons sometimes fall. One mistake is, that every resident in a country is morally bound to swear allegiance to the civil institutions of that country. Every resident in a country is bound to seek its good, to respect and obey the laws, so far as they do not require him to transgress the higher laws of Christ—to pay the taxes required of him in order to carry on the government of the country, and in all the relations of life, to endeavour to promote the ends of law and justice ; but to assert that every inhabitant of a land is morally bound to swear allegiance to its civil institutions, whatever be the character of these institutions, is unreasonable, unconstitutional, and unscriptural. Another mistake

is, that an oath of allegiance is simply a pledge to respect and obey the *rulers* of the land. That is only a part of the idea. The proper idea of an oath of allegiance is a pledge to the *constitution*. It is just a reduplication of the coronation oath. The Monarch in the coronation oath swears to maintain the constitution, and govern according to it; the subject in the oath of allegiance pledges his fealty to the Monarch in *thus governing*. Thus they are both by solemn oath, committed to the whole constitution. Another mistake is, that a refusal to swear the oath of allegiance involves one in rebellion against the existing government. None, but those who are supremely ignorant will fall into such a mistake. A declinature to take the oath of allegiance does not involve the idea of enmity to one's country. The christian will ever love his country, although he may have conscientious objections to some of its political institutions. He will ever seek the good of his country, and endeavour to promote the ends of law and justice, even when he has conscientious objections to take any oath that would involve a sanction of that which he believes to be wrong; and those who know them best will testify, that those who conscientiously decline the common oath of fealty to the British national constitution, are, at the least, not more turbulent, or seditious, than the most fulsome flatterers of British institutions.

Not to dwell, however, on these common mistakes, let it be duly considered, that those who believe in the present obligation of the oath of the Covenant, can never consistently take the oath of allegiance to the present British national constitution. The two oaths are diverse one from another, and when two things are essentially different, by no process of logic known to God or man can they be made to agree. If the

oath of the Covenant be *right*, the oath of allegiance is *wrong* ; and if the oath of allegiance is right, the oath of the Covenant is wrong. The oath of the Covenant was a recognition of the Lord Jesus Christ as the sole Head of the Church : the oath of allegiance is a recognition of the reigning Monarch as the head of the national church. The oath of the Covenant was a pledge to endeavour to extirpate Popery ; the oath of allegiance is an indirect pledge to Popery, as it is a pledge to a constitution that in some of its features is essentially Popish, and to a government that is largely supporting Popery. The oath of the Covenant was a pledge to endeavour the suppression of Prelacy ; the oath of allegiance is a pledge to *support* Prelacy as the established religion of the realm so long as Britain lasts. The oath of the Covenant was a pledge, to endeavour the preservation of the reformed religion in Scotland ; the oath of allegiance is a pledge to institutions that are founded on the entire subversion of that reformation. For any one to imagine that he can take both oaths—for any one to flatter himself, that he can maintain the binding obligation of the oath of the Covenant, and yet swear allegiance to a national society that has cast it off, that has buried it under an “ Act Recissory,” still on the statute book, and that has set up and established systems solemnly abjured in it, and that has shed the blood of multitudes for no other crime than that of adhering to it, and acting in conformity to it, and that has been carrying on its administration in plain and palpable antagonism to its principles and pledges, is the result of the grossest self-deception.

III. The views thus presented will serve to justify the position which the Reformed Presbyterian church has seen good to adopt in relation to the civil institutions of the country. For nearly two hundred

years, our Church has occupied the position of *dissent* from the National Society. In the maintenance of that position we have oftentimes been accused of "hair splitting," of "magnifying trifles," of being "righteous over much," &c. We have oftentimes been charged with folly in depriving ourselves of those civil advantages which others enjoy, and all for the sake of what are considered by some *mere bagatelles*. But to use the language of the son of Jesse on a memorable occasion, "Is there not a cause." If Britain has vilely cast away her Covenant with her God, and so has the guilt of national apostacy resting upon her, is there not a cause why we should stand aloof, lest we be partakers of her sins, and so receive of her plagues. In maintaining this position of dissent, we disclaim all hostile feelings towards the government of the country. We revere our beloved Queen as much as any people could do, and pray that all new Covenant blessings may be vouchsafed to her; we honor the subordinate rulers as much as others do; we are as seldom in courts of law for breaches of the peace as those that identify themselves with the national society; our taxes are as cheerfully and as punctually paid as are the taxes of those who claim all the civil and political privileges of British subjects; our lives and our properties are as freely at the disposal of the rulers, for the defence of the country, as are those of others. One thing only we cannot do, incorporate with what we believe to be *morally wrong*; swear an oath of allegiance to what is plainly at variance with the oath of the Covenant—a covenant to which our *ancestors* were bound, to which *we* are bound, and to which our *posterity* shall be bound, until the glorious objects shall be accomplished.

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